

PROFILE 6

Job Factors Associated with Addictive Behaviours and Mental Health Disorders

Three population-based surveys conducted in 1992, 2002 and 2009, examined the prevalence of addictive behaviours and mental health disorders throughout Alberta's workforce. Based on findings from *The Alberta Survey of Addictive Behaviours and Mental Health in the Workforce: 2009*, this profile highlights associations between addictive behaviours, mental health disorders and five important occupational factors that influence levels of job stress and satisfaction.

Description of Job Factors and Changes over time

Five key factors detailing job conditions are displayed in Table 1. Work stress and time instability significantly increased since 1992, while self-perceived risk of liability decreased. Although job value was not measured in the first survey wave, fulfillment with one's employment role has lessened slightly, albeit not significantly, relative to the 2002 survey results.

Table 1: Description of the five main job factors and summary of their changes over time

Name	Description	Change over time			
		1992	2002	2009	sig
Liability Risk	Degree to which job errors can harm self, others, employer	17%	14%	13%	***
After Hours	Extra hours responsibility (travel, remote site, entertaining clients)	28%	30%	30%	NS
Time Instability	Non-standard schedule (on call, shift work, compressed week, long hours)	11%	21%	21%	***
Job Value	Work seen as satisfying not boring; a career rather than "just a job"	---	22%	20%	NS
Work Stress	A simple rating of how stressful one's job is	77%	80%	84%	**

** p < .01 *** p < .001 NS = not significant

Is there an association between job demands and addiction/mental health problems?

Overall, all five job factors played an important role in substance use, gambling and/or mental health disorders (see Table 2). Job value was found to be the most powerful factor influencing the prevalence of addictive behaviours and mental illness. As shown by the negative values, individuals who viewed their work positively (rated their job value highly) were significantly less prone to addiction or mental health related issues. High levels of work stress did not seem to impact one's predisposition to addiction, yet substantially affected their likelihood of experiencing a mental illness. Extra responsibilities after normal work hours and non-traditional work schedules were both associated with increased substance use. Interestingly, hopelessness was significantly associated with four of the five job factors, while major depression was only related to work stress, suggesting that factors above and beyond a depression diagnosis may be worthwhile considering in the assessment of overall workplace well-being.

Table 2: Association between Job Factors and Addictive Behaviours/Mental Health

Health Measures	Liability Risk	After Hours	Time Instability	Job Value	Work Stress
Smoking	■	---	■	▲	---
Alcohol	●	■	---	▲	---
Drugs	---	■	●	---	■
Gambling	---	---	---	▲	---
Anxiety	---	---	---	▲	■
Phobia	---	▲	---	▲	---
Depression	---	---	---	---	■
Antisocial PD	---	●	●	---	---
Suicide Risk	---	---	---	★	■
Hopelessness	■	---	■	▲	●

Table Legend:

- - "Much more likely" (Odds ratio > 2)
- - "More likely" (Odds ratio of 1 to 2)
- ▲ - "Less likely" (Odds ratio of 1 to -2)
- ★ - "Much less likely" (Odds ratio of < -2)

Antisocial PD = Antisocial personality disorder.

Extreme Work Stress

- 18% of participants rated their jobs as extremely stressful.
- Heightened levels of work stress were significantly associated with an increased risk of drug abuse, anxiety, depression, suicide and feelings of hopelessness (see Table 2 above).

Occupation and Industry:

- Extreme work stress was highest amongst managers/professionals (25%) and lowest in processing/manufacturing workers (5%). It was most prevalent in health/social service fields (29%) and least common in the manufacturing industry (9%).

Summary

- Over the last couple of decades, employees appear to be faced with more after hours work, variable work schedules, and higher levels of stress, suggesting that work conditions are not improving over time.
- Job satisfaction may be a protective factor, since employees who valued their job were significantly less likely to suffer from an addiction or mental health problem.
- Although work stress only marginally impacted addictive behaviours, it was robustly associated with mental health problems.

These results suggest that it is important to effectively manage job demands and the work environment, such that occupational "hazards" associated with addiction and mental health issues are minimized and satisfaction is maximized. This may be useful for early identification strategies and programming geared towards employees at greater risk of addiction and/or mental health problems due to their job requirements. Investments in teaching healthy coping mechanisms, health promotion initiatives and illness prevention activities are warranted.

For a link to the full report, *The Alberta Survey of Addictive Behaviours and Mental Health in the Workforce: 2009*, visit: <http://ihe.ca/publications/library/2011/the-alberta-survey-of-addictive-behaviours-and-mental-health-in-the-workforce-2009/>

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